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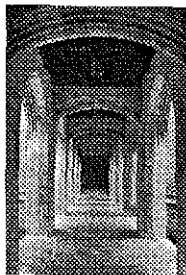
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THE EARLY KINSHIP: KENTUCKY NEGRO PUBLIC EDUCATION, LIBRARIES, AND LIBRARIANS

BY REINETTE F. JONES

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In the final decades of the nineteenth century libraries were a very minuscule part of the initial drive toward education for Kentucky's former slaves. Thirty-one years after public education became available, Thomas Fountain Blue began training Negro librarians at the Louisville Free Public Library Western Colored Branch. Another 30 years would pass before Negro librarians would be recognized by the Kentucky Negro Education Association in 1935. Unfortunately, by 1935 Blue's training program had ended and there were no institutions in Kentucky offering library training to Negroes.

To understand how this came to pass, it is necessary to start with the history of the colored school system. Colored schools were attempted as early as 1827 in Kentucky (Wilson, 1937). There was never a statute against educating slaves in Kentucky, but it was not widely encouraged; the schools were subject to being "broken up" by Whites who opposed educating Negroes (Wilson, 1937, p. 21). Berea College was the only available school of higher education and even it faced periods of forced closings (Kleber, 1992).

Following Emancipation in Kentucky (1865), Negro educators petitioned for public schools (Kleber, 1992; Simon, 1996). Nine years later, the Legislative Act of 1874 established the first system of public colored common schools in Kentucky (Russell, 1946). The following year 452 districts in 93 counties reported schools (Atwood, 1940). Students were to study spelling, reading, writing, and arithmetic – subjects few of the teachers had mastered (Ligon, 1942).

"Except for the few individuals who had attended Berea College – most of them as elementary school pupils, and a small number who had been touched by the influence of the American Missionary Association in Schools

at Louisville, Lexington, and Camp Nelson, there was practically no supply of teachers for the schools" (Russell, 1946, p. 8).

The lack of qualified teachers did not stop the growing number of common schools; nonetheless, something had to be done. In 1877 the State Superintendent of Public Instruction, H. A. Henderson, gathered 45 Negro educators and trustees and formed the State Association of Colored Teachers (Russell, 1946; Wilson, 1937). Henderson was now head of the Negro and the White education associations.

In 1913 the State Association of Colored Teachers became the Kentucky Negro Education Association (KNEA), the representative body of Kentucky's Negro teachers and a lobbying group for education issues. Librarians would be added to the association in 1935 (Librarians, 1935).

"Being president of KNEA was one of the few influential statewide positions available to black Kentuckians" (Smith, 1994, p. 88). The presidency of KNEA was heavily dominated by educated men, many of whom had or would serve as president of Negro schools.

During the initial years of the Association, members took up the task of advocating for better common school facilities and a special appeal was made for a state-supported normal school. Ten years later, 1887, the State Normal School (later Kentucky State University) opened in Frankfort, Kentucky (Ligon, 1942). The School was hailed as the first major achievement of the State Association of Colored Teachers (Russell, 1946). Prof. John M. Jackson, first president of the State Association of Colored Teachers, 1877-1878, was head of the new Normal School.

The State Normal School had one facility, a building with four rooms and a chapel (Ligon, 1942). An area within the building was designated as a library. The first professionally trained librarian, Ms. Emma B. Lewis, would take charge of the collection 42 years later (Josey & Shockley, 1977).

"Any colored person 16 years old or over who possessed good health and good moral character could enroll in the institution" (Ligon, 1942, p. 258). There were no public high schools for Negroes in Kentucky at this time; students did only primary and secondary level work (Kleber, 1992; Ligon, 1942).

Progress had been slow, but the first state-supported institution was finally available for the training of Negro teachers, and more normal schools were formed to keep pace with the still growing number of common schools. As more normal schools were formed, there came the demand for better libraries. Albert Meyzeek was to lead the charge in Louisville, Kentucky.

Meyzeek was an educator who had been temporarily transferred to Central High School in Louisville, Kentucky. Meyzeek arrived at Central in the late 1890s, he found the school unacceptable. Meyzeek reorganized the school curriculum, sought college trained teachers, and added a small conference library (Horton, 1986).

During this same time period the United States Supreme Court decision *Plessy vs. Ferguson* (1896) was handed down. The decision included public library service in the mandate of 'separate but equal' (Dumont, 1986; Malone, 1955). The mandate was the basis for a separate public library branch being established for Negroes in Louisville, Kentucky.

It was the poor condition of the Central High School library that led to the demand for a Negro branch library in Louisville. The poorly furnished school library contained inadequate reference and reading materials. Seeking better resources, Meyzeek took his senior students to the Polytechnic Society Library (later to become Louisville Public Library) (Horton, 1986; Wright, 1955).

Dr. J. Blaine Hudson explains what happened. "After a few visits they [Meyzeek and his students] were refused admittance. Meyzeek argued persistently and persuasively to the city

library that African Americans should have access to this proposed system" (1997). Thus, the issue of a separate public library for Negroes was placed on the Louisville Public Library agenda. The Western Colored Branch Library opened in 1905 with Thomas Fountain Blue as library manager (Wright, 1955).

The opening of the Western Colored Branch Library was an event; free public libraries had not been available to Negroes in the South prior to 1900. Limited service began in 1903 in a Tennessee library and in a North Carolina library. The following year Rosenberg Library, a private institution in Galveston, Texas, established a Negro branch to serve as a library agency (Gleason, 1941; Wright, 1955).

The Louisville Free Public Library Western Colored Branch was the first public library to present Negro patrons with extensive library service in a building that was not attached to a Negro school or functioned independently of the main library system (Gleason, 1941). With the success of the Western Branch, a second colored library branch was soon to open in Louisville. The second library also came about at the instigation of Albert Meyzeek.

After 3 years at Central High School, Meyzeek returned to his former post. He was given the new task of setting up a normal school to train elementary teachers. Meyzeek found that in order to carry out his new duties there must be a library (Horton, 1986). He began discussions with the Louisville Free Public Library Board once again. In May of 1909 the Louisville Free Public Library trustees voted to establish a second colored branch (Horton, 1986; Malone, 1995; Wright, 1955).

In 1910 Meyzeek was elected president of the State Industrial College at Frankfort (Kentucky State University), but he resigned and continued as principal of the Louisville Normal School. Meyzeek went on to become 18th president of the KNEA 1927-1933. He is remembered for removing political influence from the elections of the association's officers (Russell, 1946). Meyzeek led many fights for racial advances in Louisville and Kentucky; the colored branch libraries were only two advances credited to his leadership.

Both the Eastern and Western branch libraries

provided materials for teachers and students in Louisville. Arrangements were made with the Louisville Free Public Library, the Colored Branches, and the Board of Education to provide a branch library in Central High School (Wright, 1955). Joseph S. Cotter, African American poet and educator, and principal of the Samuel Coleridge Taylor School in Louisville, sponsored story contests within the libraries (KNEA, 1940; Malone, 1995; Wright, 1955). The contests were concluded during the annual meetings of the Kentucky Negro Education Association (Wright, 1955).

While various library programs were developed for children and adults, Thomas Fountain Blue had begun training Negro women for library service. News of the library training program prompted many inquiries; there had been no library training programs for Negroes in the South. Also, library work was not an advocated career for the Negro masses in the South and Thomas Fountain Blue was training only women (Johnson, 1938).

At the turn of the century a great debate was being waged concerning the mainstreaming of Negroes in America. Should Negroes receive a classical liberal education (backed by religious philanthropists) or an industrial education (backed by industrial philanthropists)? Booker T. Washington saw racial separation, friendship with White Southerners, and agricultural, industrial, and practical education as a way for Negroes to be of special service to Negro communities (Blackwell, 1981). W. E. B. DuBois wanted training for the "talented tenth" of black intellectuals who could take on positions of academic and professional responsibility, and attack racial injustice (Blackwell, 1981, p. 13).

In Kentucky, the educational choices were agricultural, industrial, and teachers training (KNEA, 1937). As the educational focus shifted, so did institutions' libraries; library collections got bigger, though not necessarily better.

In 1902 the State Normal School became the Kentucky State Industrial College (Ligon, 1942). James S. Hathaway became the school's third president; he had also been the 16th president of the State Association of Colored Teachers 1889-1890 (Russell, 1946). The school library had grown by several hundred books, but none of the books were about industries and there were few books on science and education (General Education, 1909).

The Day Law, which forbade white and colored students attending the same school, was upheld by the Supreme Court in 1908. This led to Berea College creating a black school, Lincoln Institute, in Shelbyville, Kentucky (KNEA, 1949). The Institute was to provide a Christian education with special attention to teacher training and industrial education (Commission, 1965).

The Lincoln Institute Library was made up of books passed down from Berea College with the addition of several libraries from the estates of deceased lawyers and ministers (General Education, 1936).

The growth and direction of Negro educational institutions in Kentucky included libraries, but not library training. Admission to Thomas Fountain Blue's library training program was open to those who met the standards set by the Louisville Free Public Library Board of Trustees in 1909: "a high school education or its equivalent, fair knowledge of books, good health, courteous manners, neatness of appearance and work, accuracy, reliability, general intelligence, and good judgement" (Malone, 1995; Hudson, 1997; Wright, 1955).

Blue's library training program continued for more than 20 years. Kentucky institutions never absorbed Blue's program. Library science classes were offered at the University of Kentucky in 1918, but segregation was still the law in 1918 (Kleber, 1992; University of Kentucky, 1996).

Though Kentucky had the first public library for Negroes and the only library training program for Negroes in the South, no Kentucky schools were considered in the American Library Association's search for an institution to take on the first Negro library school. The top contenders for the library school were Fisk, Howard, Tuskegee, and Hampton (Shifflett, 1994). Hampton Institute Library School (Virginia) opened in 1925 (Wright, 1955).

Around 1931 Thomas Fountain Blue's program ended, this marked the end of Negro library training in Kentucky.

In 1933 the Kentucky Department of Education established the Division of School Libraries (General Education, 1932). Ruth Theobald, supervisor of the division, aimed to develop library service for elementary schools and to set standards for the training of librarians in high schools (General Education, 1936).

& 1937). A school library group was being considered as a section of the of the Kentucky Education Association (KEA) (Commission, 1965; General Education, 1937).

Negro educators belonged to the Kentucky Negro Education Association (KNEA) (Spradling, 1980). The librarians' and teacher-librarians' conference became a division of KNEA in 1935 for the following purposes:

1. To bring together the librarians and teacher-librarians of the state of Kentucky to stimulate interest among them so that they might fully realize and emphasize the library's place in the educational realm.
2. To serve as a clearinghouse for common problems.
3. To establish a place in the curriculum for instruction in the use of library; or to establish such a course as an extra-curricula activity on the part of the librarian, but compulsory for the student.
4. To provide for a survey of conditions in Negro libraries: high school, college, and public, in Kentucky (KNEA, 1935, pp. 19-20).

The librarians' and teacher-librarians' conference was open to Negro librarians in public, school, and college libraries. The first meeting was held April 11, 1935; twelve librarians and Theobald met at Central High School

(KNEA, 1935). Theobald, the principal speaker, spoke of problems facing librarians and the benefit of Negro librarians "banding" together (KNEA, 1935, p. 20).

In 1935 standards for the training of high school librarians became mandatory (General Education, 1937). Library training for whites was available at the University of Kentucky, Murray State Teachers College, Berea College, Nazareth College in Louisville, Western Kentucky State Teachers College in Bowling Green, and Eastern Kentucky State Teachers College in Richmond. The University of Louisville was considering offering library science classes.

Library training for Negroes was available outside Kentucky at Hampton Institute Library School in Virginia, Morehouse-Spelman Summer School in Atlanta, Georgia, and Fisk University in Tennessee (Study, 1931; Johnson, 1938). Hampton was the only ALA accredited school for the training of Negro librarians (Study, 1931).

The University of Kentucky Library Science BA program was accredited by the ALA in 1942; it is Kentucky's only ALA accredited agency (Study, 1931; University of Kentucky, 1947). In 1949 Lyman T. Johnson's lawsuit opened the University to Negroes (Kleber, 1992). Thomas Fountain Blue did not live to see his brother-in-law, Johnson, become the first Negro to enroll at the University of Kentucky (Kleber, 1992; Wright, 1955).

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